

**LEPTACINUS INTERMEDIUS DONIS. (COL.: STAPHILINIDAE),
A SPECIES LITTLE KNOWN IN BRITAIN**

A.A. ALLEN

49 Montcalm Road, Charlton, London SE7 8QG

Mr. P.F. WHITEHEAD having recently (*in litt.*) raised the question of the status of this species, I embarked upon two courses: first, a critical scrutiny of my six specimens taken in the very haystack in Windsor Great Park from which the beetle was described in 1936, and in the very same year; and second, a rapid run through the indexes of the *Entomologist's Monthly Magazine* from that year on, to see whether coleopterists had followed up the original discovery and published new records in confirmation of the species.

The results were interesting and seem to call for some notice. In the first place, two of my specimens proved to be males and presented the very definite characters given for that sex of *L. intermedius* in the foreign literature, thus dispelling any doubt that might remain about the validity of our species and its identity with the continental one to which its name has long been applied. In the second, no further reference to *L. intermedius* in our leading journal (as regards Coleoptera) came to light — notwithstanding that the name has figured in all subsequent catalogues and check-lists. This is of course not to say that our literature contains no such references; but it is safe, I think, to infer that the species has been widely, if not generally, ignored or passed over in Britain since its discovery.

The reason for this neglect is not far to seek. The late Horace Donisthorpe acquired a reputation — not undeserved, it must be owned — for allowing zeal in the “creation” of new species to outstrip critical judgement. *L. intermedius* was described at a period when several such “species” (few of which have stood the test of time) were being published. More importantly, his description actually overlooks the essential specific features, confined unfortunately to the male, which would have stamped his species at once as authentic. Instead, the characters given there, relating to size, head-shape, elytral coloration etc, and even the number of punctures in the pronotal rows, turn out to be almost unusable because of their variability; they may have, at best, some small statistical value only. The species is indeed intermediate on the whole between its two British allies, *L. batychrus* Gyll. and *L. pusillus* Steph. (= *linearis* Grav., auct.). The accompanying figures show the heads of the three species as decidedly different, yet this is not borne out by the insects themselves. In particular, the head-shape given to *linearis* is too short and triangular; the figure must surely have been drawn from an atypical specimen. Influenced no doubt by these considerations, the staphylinid specialists of the day, notably the late C.E. Tottenham and W.O. Steel, tended to be sceptical of Donisthorpe's

species, believing the *intermedius* of continental authors to be something different — an opinion now seen to be untenable.

Donisthorpe did not regard the aedeagus of his species as diagnostic, remarking that “it differs little, except in proportion to size, in all three”. This however, is not the case. The extraordinarily large aedeagus of *batychnus* is somewhere about 20 times greater in area than the very small narrow organ of *pusillus*, yet the beetle itself is nowhere near 20 times as large! That of *intermedius* is less than halfway between these extremes and of a much broader, more rounded form than in *pusillus* (the species more likely to be confused with *intermedius*) and similar to that of *formicetorum* Märk.; it is thus quite determinative. Even more so is the male 6th sternite, the hind margin of which is broadly and deeply excavate, almost in the form of an open \wedge with the vertex varying from an angle to a smooth curve, and bearing long hairs towards the corners. In the other species (especially *pusillus*) the excavation is very much shallower and with at most an even fringe of very short hairs. Figures will be found e.g. in Lohse (1964: 159) or Hansen (1952: 9).

It is of interest to note that in mid-Europe *intermedius* is the commonest *Leptacinus* overall, according to Lohse (p.160); whilst in Britain *pusillus* is easily the commonest. The former species when better known will almost surely prove widespread, though possibly very local. I have not found it elsewhere than as above, but have a female from G.H. Ashe labelled without query as *intermedius* (Hartlebury, Worcs, iii.31) — I believe correctly, but cannot be certain. At present only two definite records outside Windsor can be given: Mr Colin Johnson took it in a haystack at Broadbottom, Cheshire, together with *pusillus*, about 20 years ago or more; and my friend Prof. J.A. Owen has a series from a compost heap in the garden of Tooting Hospital, S.W. London, taken in January 1975, and checked from two males. Donisthorpe (p.270) mentions “a good series” placed as “*linearis* var.” in the D. Sharp collection, but does not give the locality.

References

- Donisthorpe, H.StJ.K., 1936. *Leptacinus intermedius* n.sp. (Col.: Staphylinidae), a beetle new to science. *Entomologist's mon. Mag.* 72: 269-270 & Pl. V.
 Hansen, V., 1952. *Danmarks Fauna* 58: *Biller* 16 (Rovbiller 2). Kobenhavn.
 Lohse, G.A., in Freude, H., Harde, K.H., & Lohse, G.A., 1964. *Die Käfer Mitteleuropas*, 4. Krefeld.

Epermenia insecurella (Staint) (Lep.: Epermeniidae) in Wiltshire

Whilst on a field visit to the central area of the Salisbury Plain Army Training Area on 3rd June 1990, Dr Langmaid suggested that a search be made of patches of *Thesium humifusum* (Bastard Toadflax) for *Epermenia insecurella*. The first site for the plant drew a blank, mainly due to the